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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2016

Mirror maze

Fun to come on Clifton Hill.
Page 3.

Refugees reflect

Government funding coming to an end.
Page 18

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LAURA BARTON/
POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Ben Whithall, left, and Dennis Eden of Dennis Eden Electrical Contractor, worked last Thursday morning to repair some of the light fixtures at The Bargain! Shop that was damaged in Wednesday's crash when a car came through the Port Colborne storefront. The front doors which would have been behind Whithall have been replaced temporarily by boards and insulation. See more on page 2.

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New program promotes housing partnerships

MARYANNE FIRTH
Postmedia Network

An innovative approach to affordable housing is being taken to lessen the lengthy local waiting list.

Niagara Regional Housing is introducing a new program that will support construction of new affordable units by private landlords.

The agency has its first partnership lined up under the New Development Housing Allowance program and, following approval of regional council last Thursday night, has made a 20-year commitment

to fund 20

units in the new Bethlehem Housing and Support Services (BHSS) project.

The 80-unit project will be built at 111 Church St. in St. Catharines.

NRH will fund 20 units at a cost of \$250 per month per unit for singles and \$300 per month per unit for families.

NRH board chairman Paul Grenier, regional councillor for Welland, commended staff for developing an unconventional method for helping to address Niagara's growing housing need.

"This is an outstanding report before us," he said during the council meeting. "It is novel, creative and provides a great partnership to create housing units."

It's a program Grenier believes will gain traction throughout the province once it's introduced.

"It's something we can be truly proud of here in Niagara."

The BHSS project is taking place in collaboration with FirstOntario Credit Union and Penn Terra Group Ltd.

A 20-year funding commitment from NRH was requested in order to secure project financing.

It's expected to cost NRH between \$60,000 and \$72,000 per year and monthly payments are expected to begin in 2018.

Money for the program will be reallocated from the rent supplement program.

St. Catharines Mayor Wal-

ter Sendzik commended staff for the innovative approach.

It's a chance, he said, for Niagara to "take a calculated opportunity and seize it."

with a third-party operator in terms of finance development and a not-for-profit to help address the housing shortage we have."

Sendzik felt it was an "important moment" for Niagara that will significantly impact housing in the future.

He believes it will help to "accelerate chipping away" at the ever-growing wait list.

If the initial project goes well, "I think it will set the stage for a lot more investment in the community for affordable housing and will help those in our community who have been on that list for far too long," he said.

mfirth@postmedia.com



LAURA BARTON/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

This Honda goes through the newly renovated front entrance of The Bargain! Shop in Port Colborne after pickup hit the Honda but was quickly arrested by police.

Bargain! Shop stays open for business

LAURA BARTON
Postmedia Network

Things have been put back into working order after a car came crashing through The Bargain! Shop's storefront last Wednesday morning in Port Colborne.

Or at least as much in working order as things can be. By last Thursday morning, the registers and displays had all been set back up for business and the floor had been cleared of any debris.

Where the doors once were, however, the wall has been replaced with boards. How long they will stay there isn't yet known.

"Now, it's an insurance issue, not just a construction issue, so there are a bunch of other factors that are out of my control," said Fred Davies,

owner of The Bargain! Shop. "I would start fixing it today if I could, but there's now corporate bureaucracy that kind of takes over the process."

Davies said there are four insurance companies involved with figuring out how the storefront is going to get fixed — his own, the store's, the insurer of the owner of a Honda that ended up in the store, as well as the insurer of the driver who started the seven-vehicle collision.

The collision, which involved a driver who has been charged with operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol and six counts of failing to stop at the scene of a collision, has made headlines across several news outlets.

Besides general coverage for the fiasco, Davies himself has also been interviewed several

times about what happened when his newly finished storefront was crashed through.

"The amount of publicity (the store is) getting out of this is amazing," he said. "That would be the nice blessing is if (it) actually did see an increase in business because of the awareness."

"Let's hope so because this sucks." Store manager Rachel Williams said she's hoping to set up an additional fold to accommodate any influx that might come in.

She was one of the people who helped put the store back together. She said while the cleanup was happening, someone found a piece of the car.

"When (the cleanup crew) came, cleaning through the boxes, we found the Honda

ornament," she said.

She calls it a miracle that no one was seriously injured in the incident.

The store will remain open, although patched up while the insurance companies sort out the details.

Contractor Bill Day, who works with Merit Contractors, said once the rebuild starts, it will take six to eight weeks to get it back to where it was. The doors will need to be rebuilt, as will a small wall at the entrance and glass around the doors will need to be replaced.

Davies commended the Port Colborne Fire and Emergency Services, saying its personnel went above and beyond to make sure the store was secure and everyone was safe.

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Donations, traffic up at festival of lights

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

The Winter Festival of Lights is on track for another banner year. After three weeks, officials have seen a 10 per cent increase in vehicle traffic and a 12 per cent spike in donations at Dufferin Islands in Niagara Falls.

The festival is also a favourite for tour buses, as 173 have already been through the park — compared to 140 last season.

"We're really excited. It's been going really good," said Tina Myers, the event's executive director.

"The money (from donations) goes towards the maintenance of the lights, just to set up, tear down and maintain them through the year costs probably close to \$200,000. Last year we got about \$175,000 in donations, that all went towards the maintenance."

The 34th edition of the festival began Nov. 19 and continues until Jan. 31.

Niagara Parks Commission has invested \$300,000 on lighting, programming and infrastructure improvements within Queen Victoria Park.



Winter Festival of Lights.

RAY SPITERI/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

New additions include a 10-foot tall 3D woolly mammoth as part of the Canadian wildlife displays at Dufferin Islands.

There are also several illumination-themed events throughout the entire 56-kilometre Niagara Parks, and a new \$4-million LED lighting system that provides twice the lighting levels on the Horseshoe and American Falls.

"We added 55 lights to the Canadian Niagara Power Plant. We illuminated it all in green and red and that's part of a three-phase plan," said Myers.

"We're going to continue to add lights and then we're going to animate it."

"We also have ... 60,000 lights all across from Dufferin Islands, so when you exit, now there's all these other illuminations that are right there on the trees."

Myers said the festival is not just popular with tourists. She said residents who enjoy taking in all the sights and sounds with their families.

Last year, the festival attracted more than 1.2 million visitors and had a direct economic impact of \$54 million in Niagara.

Mirror maze coming to Clifton Hill

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

Construction is underway on a \$3-million, circus-themed mirror and laser-maze attraction on Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls.

It will replace the former Brick City, which was a giant mini city of Legos.

That attraction was demolished last fall after a fire in the attic of the Haunted House next door in August 2014 caused water and smoke damage.

"It was a gift store that was built in 1960, and then it had a Cinema 180 movie theatre on top of it, which then became Brick City," Niagara Clifton Group president Charlie Burland said.

Burland's family has owned property on the north side of the hill for 90 years.

"When we had the fire ... we had the option of rebuilding what was there, or ... rebuild an attraction that we thought would do better than what was there before."

Burland said his father wanted to open a mirror maze for decades, so when the opportunity became available "we knew what we were going to do."

He said construction on the 2,500-square-foot Big Top Amazing Mirror and Laser Maze attraction began right after Labour Day, and the aim is to open between April and June.

He said the Big Top Amazing Mirror and Laser Maze will cost about \$3 million.



MIKE DIMATTIA/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Clifton Group president Charlie Burland on Clifton Hill in Niagara Falls where construction has begun on a new circus-themed mirror and laser-maze attraction.

"It's basically two attractions in one. You can do the mirror-maze portion, or you can do the laser-maze portion, or you can do both."

"You go through about half the mirror maze, and then you go into a few other rooms. One is a claustrophobic room, one is a curtain chaos, which is a curtain maze, and then when you go through those, then you get back into the mirror maze, and you find your way out."

He said the attraction will feature animated characters such as lions, tigers and tightrope walkers.

Burland said his company has started marketing the attraction, including an information banner

wrapped around the front part of the construction site.

He said it will be for all ages, and will be accessible to those with disabilities.

Burland said it's a good time to improve the attraction offerings on his properties because of the rebound the Niagara Falls tourism industry has experienced in recent years.

"We had the best year since Sept. 11 (2001)," he said. "The U.S. dollar helps, it keeps Canadians home, it attracts the Americans. With all the instability in Europe, a lot of Americans and Canadians decided to stay home."

"I think a lot of Europeans decided to come to Canada because we're relatively a

safe country."

Burland said those in the industry often talk about the "perfect storm" of issues that have hurt the sector in past years, such as the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States, and the subsequent requirement for North American cross-border travellers to carry passports.

"This (past year) was the perfect storm, but it was the perfect storm in the right direction for a change," he said.

"What will next year be like? Everything is pointing toward next year being as good as this year, if not better, but who knows?"

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P POSTMEDIA

I've been thinking about light shining in the darkness

REV. THOMAS R. ARTH

First Evangelical Lutheran Church

I love Christmas lights, when I was a kid my dad would run a string of coloured lights along the eavesrough at the front of our house and then swap out the white light bulbs by the front door and over the garage door with green bulbs.

On our house we've got a string of lights along the eavesroughs as well and they've been up there for years. Ours is a two storey house and as with many houses in Port Colborne, the basement comes above the ground three or four feet so the eavesrough is more like two and a half stories high. I climbed a long extension ladder to hang those lights and I wasn't going to do that year after year so they'll stay up there until they burn out or the colour fades.

In addition, we've got some green and red flood lights shining on the house. This year hanging from the walnut tree we have a four foot Mennonite Star (Herrnhuter Stern in German) with a light inside. When our kids were younger we also set up a few of those inflatable lawn ornaments, but over the years they got a little dirty and ratty looking, so they've been retired.

At church last month we had our first of what we hope becomes an annual Christmas Market. We strung lights back and forth between the church and the office — it looked really festive. We don't light those every night, but I'm pretty sure they'll be on Christmas Eve.

Every year around this time we like to just drive around to look at the various light displays that people put up at their homes or businesses. My wife and I have an ongoing difference of opinion that has lasted years. I prefer multicoloured lights and think they look more festive. My wife prefers them all white and says it looks classy. So at our houses we have multicoloured lights and inside is all



Festive Christmas lights at a home in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

JULIE JOSEPH/POST MEDIA NETWORK

white.

Some people get very elaborate with their lights, we've even found places that time their lights to flash to the rhythm of music that they broadcast so you can hear it on your radio in the car as you park at the side of the road to watch. I don't know how well that goes over with the neighbours, but I think it's totally cool.

I think it's a shame when all the lights get taken down, but I guess if they were always on after a while you might

get bored of them. I'd be willing to give it a try. I remember a house in the Burlington neighbourhood where I lived before moving to Port Colborne, one house suddenly had their coloured lights on in February long after everyone else had taken their's down, or at least stopped turning them on. Then I realized they had a Chinese family and they had them on for Chinese New Year which fell late that year.

The Bible talks about the coming of Jesus in terms of a light, "the light shines in the

darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it," (John 1:5). Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life," (John 8:12).

Some Christian traditions light an Advent wreath starting four Sundays before Christmas and lighting one more candle on the wreath as the weeks progress. As we get closer to the darkest time of the year in the northern hemisphere the light from the Advent wreath grows brighter

until we celebrate the birth of the light of the world, Jesus Christ.

There is darkness in our world and many people have real cause for fear, true reasons for sadness, and live with despair. But Christians believe that in Jesus there is cause for hope. Being a Christian is no magic formula for constant happiness and nothing but sunshine and rainbows. One of the names used for Jesus in the Bible is Emmanuel (Matthew 1:23). It's a Hebrew word meaning "God with us." It

means that through the dark moments of our lives God is with us.

The passages I quoted above say "the light shines in the darkness," but the darkness still exists. If we follow the "light of the world" the darkness may still surround us, but we walk with the light shining on our path.

May your coming holiday celebrations be blessed, and if this Christmas happens to be a dark time in your life I pray the light of Emmanuel may shed some light for your way.

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Exotic animal bylaw pushed to new year

LAURA BARTON
Postmedia Network

Wainfleet's discussions about a potential exotic animal bylaw will continue into the new year.

The township heard concerns from residents at both a public and council meeting recently. Staff and councillors are going to take those comments and any others into consideration before the bylaw comes before council again.

"Whenever we go and we do a new bylaw, especially something as specific as this, you're always worried who's going to get caught up in this down the road that you didn't think of and maybe there should have been different provisions in," said Mayor April Jeffs about why discussions are going on for so long.

She said public and council meetings weren't well attended, but aldermen did hear some "genuine concerns" from

those who did speak.

At the public meeting, she said, it was more about getting into the nitty gritty of the bylaw. Before council, there were three speakers who addressed the matter.

One of those was Mark Drysdale, owner of Ringtail Ranch and Rescue in Wainfleet.

Despite bylaw officer Mark Turdill having said the bylaw isn't directed at the animal operation, Drysdale is still concerned that it is and how negatively the operation will be affected.

During his presentation to council, he said he thinks Wainfleet's staff is just afraid of animals.

"It's not my job for what I do to concern myself with the fear that your staff has of animals," he said. "That's something that's really a job of a psychiatrist."

See EXOTIC on A9



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- Marketing, communications or business experience

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The board includes representation from housing providers, regional council, tenants and the general public.

Special consideration will be given to those with financial experience and/or an understanding of the legal environment, social policy development, contract evaluation, government relations and human resources. As our clients represent a diverse array of multi-cultural groups, experience with various ethnic groups would also be considered an asset.

Applications are available at www.nrh.ca or by calling Regional Councillor Paul Grenier, NRH Chair at 905-980-6000 x 3965. The deadline for submissions is January 13, 2017. We thank all interested parties; but only those being considered for positions will be contacted.



NIAGARA WHALERS KEEP WIN STREAK ALIVE ON THUNDERSTICK GIVEAWAY AND TEDDY BEAR TOSS NIGHT

The Niagara Whalers Jr. 'A' hockey club extended their winning streak to 16-in-a-row after Friday's home 4-1 victory against the North York Renegades at the Vale Health and Wellness Center. This was the first time these two teams met, and was a pivotal battle for South division supremacy. The Renegades were a strong test sitting right behind the Whalers in 2nd place by win percentage.

The next Whalers' home game at the Vale Health and Wellness Center will be 2 Showcase tournament games against the North division 2nd and 1st place teams at 1:00pm and 5:00pm respectively on Tuesday, December 13th. This will truly be a clash of the titans, especially the 2nd game, where the Whalers will face-off against the North division 1st place juggernaut, the New Tecumseth Civics (Alliston). The Civics only have 2 losses on the entire season. This will be the 1-and-only meeting between these 2 teams in the season, and is the odds on favourite to be the 2 teams in the finals for the Russel Cup Championship.


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'Animals by nature... are unpredictable'

ETOTIC from A5

He said as an operation that is already announced four times annually — twice announced and twice unannounced — by the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to animals, he doesn't see how this bylaw is needed for a place like his.

In a previous interview about the bylaw, he did want to make clear that a bylaw should be in place for Wainfleet because people think the lack of one means they can own anything, but it needs to be done right.

Stefanos Karatopis, a member of the Ontario Landowners Association, wanted to draw council's attention to legal issues and how the bylaw might infringe upon the property and constitutional rights of residents.

Jeffs said these concerns will definitely be taken into consideration moving forward.

John Greer, executive director of Welland and District Humane Society, came before council to outline more of the details concerning a bylaw like this.

Among his concerns about not knowing what costs exist in the area are what foreign diseases they might bring in and the unpredictability of animals in general.

"Animals by their nature, and this goes for all animals, are unpredictable and that attribute coupled with natural defences such as venom or strength can pose a hazard to custodians and the public if they escape," Greer said.

He said the humane society wants to keep animals and people safe.

Jeffs said moving forward she is hoping to hear more comments from residents.

She calls the process a collaborative effort and urges residents to get in touch with the township by phone or by e-mail.

Ringtail Ranch has made a post to its Facebook page asking for support against the bylaw.

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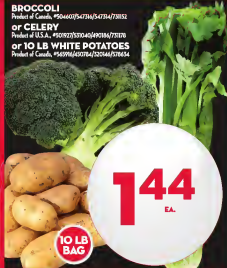
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Wainfleet calls for NPCA audit

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

The Township of Wainfleet and its mayor, April Jeffs, have joined the chorus of voices calling for a comprehensive audit of Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Jeffs last week put forward a motion asking the conservation authority to hire "an independent third party" to conduct an audit "such as a value-for-money audit and/or forensic audit, above and beyond their annual financial audits."

Wainfleet's town council passed the motion.

Jeffs, a member of the NPCA board of directors, said recent controversies surrounding NPCA and the public appetite for an audit are impossible to ignore.

She said things have reached a point where an audit is necessary to answer questions about NPCA's governance and transparency.

"I always come back to a simple question. 'What would I do in Wainfleet?'" she said in an interview Sunday.

"And if this was Wainfleet, I

would request an audit."

The call from Wainfleet's council for an NPCA audit is the second Niagara council ask for the review this month.

Last week, St. Catharines city council passed a motion to send a letter to Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Ministry of Natural Resources to begin an investigation and forensic audit of the NPCA.

Welland NDP MPP Cindy Forster has also called for a probe of the NPCA.

See AUDIT on A16

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Mayor a member of conservation authority board

AUDIT from A33

The authority came under scrutiny recently after local activist Ed Smith issued a report critical of the NPCA titled "A Call for Accountability at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority."

Smith's report is critical of the way the authority operates and alleges management at the authority is rife with conflicts of interest and questionable practices.

NPCA has threatened legal action against Smith for distributing his report, and has demanded an apology. It has also asked Smith to concede to a written "undertaking" confirming he will not distribute the report and that he will not make any defamatory statements about the authority in the future.

The night St. Catharines city council debated the motion to send a letter to Queen's Park, NPCA board chairman and St.

Catharines regional Coun. Bruce Timms said a forensic audit is a waste of money.

Jeffs said Sunday while he prefers a value-for-money audit of NPCA, she remains open to other types of audits.

The mayor supported a motion at Niagara regional council in May calling for an NPCA audit, but that motion was defeated.

However, she said interest in an audit has grown since then, and

“

I always come back to a simple question. 'What would I do in Wainfleet?'"

April Jeffs



she believes are there other NPCA board members who would like to go forward with it.

Jeffs said she intends to raise the issue directly at the next NPCA board meeting. The meeting is not until next month, she said, giving her time to properly frame how she wants to present the request for an audit to the board.

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Belal Musa Agha, left, and Hiba El Houry celebrate their first anniversary in Canada with their children Jana Musa Agha, 9, and Fares Musa Agha, 5.

MICHELLE ALLENBERG-POSTMEDIA NETWORK

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THE NIAGARA FALLS
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The Standard

THE TRIBUNE

A year of earning

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

“

I said it is hard to learn English grammar, but I love to speak English.”

Hiba El Houry

When the Syrian refugee family of four arrived in Toronto last December they didn't know how much their lives would change in one year.

As Belal Musa Agha, his wife Hiba El Houry and three church sponsors Barb Yakobowski, Leslie Kennedy and Marie-Anne Alvey sit at their dining room table talking and laughing, Musa Agh and El Houry's children play with Christmas lights.

Members of St. James and St. Brendan Church in Port Colborne have become the family's extended family sharing Canadian holidays and traditions together.

With limited knowledge of English, Musa Agha and El Houry say they have enjoyed settling into life in Port Colborne.

Learning English has been something they have dedicated their time to, but El Houry said sometimes it can be difficult.

“I said it is hard to learn English grammar, but I love to speak English,” El Houry said.

Their children, Jana Musa Agha, 9, and Fares Musa Agha, 5, go to school and speak English with ease. Jana said she enjoys learning English and laughed saying she will be a translator.

El Houry said finding local jobs has also been difficult. Musa Agha started working part time at the Smoking Buddha and a Chinese restaurant in the city, but hasn't managed to get full-time hours for himself.

Once the family has been in Canada for a year it will no longer receive assistance from the federal government as part of the sponsorship program.

Kennedy said Musa Agha is enjoying his work at both restaurants, but he will need full-time hours to support his family.

“First step is we are going to get them signed up through Canada Works to get some social assistance, because they aren't employed full-time, so they can't manage financially on their own just yet,” Kennedy said.

Although El Houry hasn't found a job, she has been volunteering at Port Village Retirement Home in Port Colborne.

She works in the cafe at the retirement home serving coffee and helping with other tasks.

El Houry said she enjoys working there because she can practise speaking English and meet people.

“I'm excited to have a job and have Canadian experience, I love this,” El Houry said.

The three church members said they will continue to support the family as much as they can and that their relationship hasn't ended just because the sponsorship term has ended.

Kennedy said the family needs some dental work in the near future, so Canada Works will help with that.

She said the family is also looking for a different apartment because the children are sharing a room at the moment.

Kennedy said since Jana is getting older, she will need her own space away from her brother, so the church members are trying to help with that as well.

“It's not easy finding affordable apartments,” Kennedy said.

During the summer Jana enjoyed spending time with members of the church who took them swimming, to the park and to one of the member's farms.

The family event spent Thanksgiving with church members and are looking forward to experiencing a Canadian Christmas.

El Houry laughed saying the women can't run from her.

“They are stuck with me, I love them,” she said with a smile.

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LIMITED EDITION

New!
**All Butter
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MAKES 24 COOKIES
454 g

4⁹⁹



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2 PORTIONS 200 g

save 50%
4⁴⁹



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New! **8⁹⁹**
15 PIECES 300 g



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Battered
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15⁹⁹ save \$1



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8⁹⁹

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Cheese Ball

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920 g

save \$2
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- Strawberry Shortcake

13⁹⁹ save \$2



Strawberry
Shortcake

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